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ABSTRACT

The position of rural principal differs from that of the urban school administrator, often requiring more sacrifice to earn administrative credentials and demanding day-to-day involvement in every aspect of school activity. This paper reports the results of a 7-state study of 600 principals to determine differences between principalships in rural and urban settings, the attractions of rural principals' positions, and to identify the future rural administrators. Of the respondents, 82% were male. Only 47% planned to be in their present positions in 5 years. All had teaching experience, 69% in rural schools, with the majority having taught more than 6 years; however, 55% had not taught in their present districts prior to becoming administrators, and 59% noted that no one else in their districts held administrative certification. Only 60% of those principals whose teaching experience was at the elementary level were classroom teachers. The others were physical education teachers, counselors, or special education teachers. The greatest source of supplemental income was spouses' salaries. The paper raises a number of questions about the source of future principals, the reasons men comprise the overwhelming majority of principals, whether standards for rural principals should be raised or altered, and the need for special programs to prepare rural principals. (DHP)

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BECOMING A RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:

A SEVEN-STATE STUDY

Presentation before
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October 9, 1989
Reno, Nevada

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BECOMING A RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: A SEVEN-STATE STUDY

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During the 1980's, waves of school reform have flowed about the country, all replete with recommendations for raising the performance of students through improving the schools. Beginning with A Nation at Risk in 1984, a report that critically inspected the very fiber and vatality of the nation's educational machine, practically everyone has felt a need to help redesign education. President Bush's conference with the governors is the latest attempt to focus attention on the nation's schools; the results of this conference will not be known immediately.

The list of reform issues is lengthy, ranging from revamping school courses to upgrading graduation requirements, from developing teacher evaluation processes to raising standards for teacher certification, from empowering teachers to improving the preparation and inservice training of school administrators. This last issue, the training of school administrators, is probably one of the most crucial because of the critical importance of the school principal to the success of the school and of students. That an effective school has an effective leader has become almost a trite observation; yet, many of the nation's thousands of schools lack such an administrative leader.

The grim condition of many administrator preparation programs was highlighted in Leaders for America's Schools in 1988 with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration established in partial response to this report. The National Policy Board's Agenda for Reform, published this year, stated that school principals must be prepared and ready to work in diverse and creative ways with all their constituencies under unique and often trying circumstances. With statistics indicating that high percentages of current principals are planning to leave the field within the next ten years, the question becomes one of quantity as well as quality. From where are the well-prepared, creative, ambitious, visionary school principals going to come to provide leadership for our schools of the 21st century?

Who is attracted to school administration, who is currently earning the credentials for the school principalship, who is being employed as vacancies occur, and what type of preparation programs are training prospective principals are questions of interest to current principals, aspiring principals, school district personnel officers, and college professors of educational administration. As evidenced in many of the reform reports, the principalship is being studied more closely than ever in its history. Yet, the national reports too frequently gloss over the particular characteristics of the rural school administrator and the challenges of rural school leadership.

The position of rural principal is different from that of urban school administrator. Those who are rural school principals earned their credentials often through a greater sacrifice of time and effort than did their city colleagues. The rural teacher desiring to enter school administration could not jump into a car after school and simply drive across town for evening classes at the local university. The rural principal is often in the spotlight in the rural community with every action a reflection on the school as he or she may be expected to be in church every Sunday, at every school event, in every civic organization, and at every public occasion. The rural principal usually has no assistant principal or administrative assistant to whom tasks can be delegated but must teach any class when a teacher is out, stoke up the boiler or shovel the sidewalk if the custodian is ill, take attendance if the secretary is late, provide counseling, first aid, disciplinary sanctions, or coaching when needed, and drive the bus when a driver quits. The rural principal enjoys little cameraderie with other school administrators because he or she may be the only person in such a position in the district. Therefore, the rural principal is without question the key person in the

effective operation of the school. Yet, information about the rural principal often gets swallowed up in the data collected about the school principalship in general.

Purpose of Study

A preliminary study of the principalship conducted in 1988 in the state of Utah led to the conclusion that the differences in the nature of the position between rural and urban settings had not been defined. Therefore, a major purpose of this study was to identify the typical characteristics of rural principals and their schools. A second purpose was to attempt to determine why persons were attracted to the rural principalship and what type of preparation those persons had had. A third purpose was to gather information about identification of future rural administrators, rural administrator placement processes, and position turnover. The investigators hoped that implications for the rural principalship of the future could be derived from data collected in seven predominately rural states.

Design of the Study

The study focused on seven states in the Rocky Mountain West: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. A six-page survey instrument containing 34 items was designed (see Appendix A) and mailed to rural school principals in the spring of 1989.

A sample of 600 rural principals was selected from the seven states by random selection from a master list of school principals from each state. The master list was delimited to only those public schools with fewer than 600 students and outside of metropolitan areas. The number of surveys sent to each state was based on the percentage of schools in that state that fit the study requirements. From this mailing, 307 usable surveys were returned for a return rate of 51%. The response rate for each state is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

RURAL SURVEY RESPONSES BY STATE

State	Number Sent	Number Returned	% Returned
Arizona	84	44	52
Colorado	138	72	52
Idaho	72	39	54
Montana	180	75	42
Nevada	30	15	50
Utah	42	27	64
Wyoming	54	35	65
TOTALS	600	307	51

Findings of Study

The results of the study are presented in three sections: the characteristics of rural principals and their schools, the certification and preparation of rural principals, and the selection and employment practices of rural school districts. The number of respondents for each question is given (n). The percentages may not always add to exactly 100% because of rounding.

Characteristics of Rural School Principals

As shown on Table 2, 18% of the respondents were women and 82% were men.

Table 2

GENDER OF RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Gender	% Respondents
Women	18
Men	82

n = 303

Table 3 indicates that less than 1% of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years of age, 23% were between 31 and 40 years of age, 46% of the respondents were between 41 and 50 years of age, 29% were between 51 and 60 years of age, and 1% were over 60 years of age.

Table 3

AGE OF RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Age	% Respondents
20 - 30 years	<1
31 - 40 years	23
41 - 50 years	46
51 - 60 years	29
Over 60 years	1

n = 303

As evident on Table 4, 76% of women respondents and 94% of men respondents were married.

Table 4

MARITAL STATUS OF RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Gender	% Married	% Not Married
Women	76	24
Men	94	6

n = 300

In response to the question about where they had spent their "growing-up" years, 30% of the respondents reported those years were spent on farms or ranches, 32% said those years were spent in small towns of under 2500 population, 20% said those years were spent in cities of between 2500 and 30,000 population, and 18% said those years were spent in metropolitan areas of over 30,000 population. (See Table 5.)

Table 5

LOCATION WHERE RURAL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS SPENT THEIR "GROWING-UP" YEARS

Place	% Respondents
Farm or Ranch	30
Small Town	32
City	20
Metropolitan Area	18

n = 303

As shown on Table 6, 6% of the respondents had spent less than 1 year in their present school districts as administrators, 46% had spent 1 to 5 years, 23% had spend 6 to 10 years, 11% had spent 11 to 15 years, 9% had spent 16 to 20 years, 4% had spent 21 to 25 years, and 1% had spent over 25 years in their present districts.

Table 6

RURAL PRINCIPALS' YEARS OF SERVICE
AS ADMINISTRATORS IN PRESENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Years of Service in District	% Respondents
Less than 1 year	6
1 - 5 years	46
6 - 10 years	23
11 - 15 years	11
16 - 20 years	9
21 - 25 years	4
Over 25 years	1

n = 303

Table 7 indicates the number of years that respondents taught before becoming administrators. Less than 1% taught less than 1 year, 10% taught 1 to 3 years, 20% taught 4 to 6 years, 30% taught 7 to 10 years, 23% taught 11 to 15 years, and 17% taught 15 or more years before they became administrators.

Table 7

NUMBER OF YEARS OF TEACHING
BEFORE RURAL PRINCIPALS BECAME ADMINISTRATORS

Years as Teacher	% Respondents
Less than 1 year	<1
1 - 3 years	10
4 - 6 years	20
7 - 10 years	30
11 - 15 years	23
Over 15 years	17

n = 301

The majority of respondents (55%) indicated that they had not taught in their present districts prior to becoming administrators, as shown on Table 8.

Table 8

RURAL PRINCIPALS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE
IN PRESENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS
PRIOR TO BECOMING ADMINISTRATORS

Teaching Experience	% Respondents
Yes (taught in present district)	45
No (did not teach in district)	55

n = 300

When asked where they had taught the longest period of time prior to becoming administrators, 69% of respondents indicated they had taught in rural schools, 26% indicated they had taught in urban schools, and 5% indicated they had taught in other settings. (See Table 9.)

Table 9

TYPE OF SCHOOL WHERE RURAL PRINCIPALS
HAD MOST TEACHING EXPERIENCE
PRIOR TO BECOMING ADMINISTRATORS

Type of School	% Respondents
Rural	69
Urban	26
Other	5

n = 301

Table 10 indicates that 34% of the respondents had taught at the elementary school level the longest period of time before becoming school administrators, 16% had taught at the middle or junior high school level, 31% had taught at the high school level, 14% had taught at the junior/senior high school level, and 5% had taught at other levels for the longest period of time before becoming school administrators.

Table 10

SCHOOL LEVEL WHERE RURAL PRINCIPALS HAD MOST TEACHING EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO BECOMING ADMINISTRATORS

School Level	% Respondents
Elementary	34
Middle/Junior High	16
High School	31
Junior/Senior High	14
Other	5

n = 300

According to survey results, 60% of the respondents who taught at the elementary level the longest prior to becoming administrators were classroom teachers and 40% held other positions, such as counselor, special education teacher, or physical education teacher. (See Table 11.)

Table 11

MAJOR ASSIGNMENT OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS PRIOR TO BECOMING ADMINISTRATORS

Assignment	% Respondents
Classroom Teacher	60
Other	40

n = 102

Table 12 summarizes the major teaching areas of the respondents who were secondary teachers prior to becoming administrators. The greatest percentages of respondents taught history (20%), science (17%), physical education (13%), and math (12%).

Table 12

MAJOR TEACHING AREAS OF SECONDARY TEACHERS PRIOR TO BECOMING ADMINISTRATORS

Teaching Area	% Respondents
History	20
Science	17
Physical Education	13
Math	12
English	9
Vocational Education	8
Special Education	5
Counselor/Psychologist	5
Music	2
Foreign Language	2
Art	<1
Other	6

n = 178

In answer to a question about coaching experience, 58% reported that they had been coaches of athletic teams and 43% reported they had no such experience while teaching. (See Table 13.)

Table 13

COACHING EXPERIENCE OF RURAL PRINCIPALS PRIOR TO BECOMING ADMINISTRATORS

Coaching Experience	% Respondents
Yes (coached athletic teams)	58
No (did not coach athletic teams)	42

n = 299

According to Table 14, 53% of the respondents received supplemental income from spouse income, 13% from farms or ranches, 8% from businesses, 6% from teaching extension or continuing education courses, 5% from consulting work, 4% from teaching courses at a college or university, and 13% from other sources.

Table 14

SOURCES OF SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME FOR RURAL PRINCIPALS

Income Source	% Respondents
Spouse income	53
Farm or ranch	13
Business	8
Teaching extension/continuing education courses	6
Consulting work	5
Teaching university courses	4
Other	11

n = 303

Table 15 indicates that 89% of the respondents held full administrative certification, 4% held provisional/probationary/temporary certification, and 6% held other types of certification.

Table 15

TYPES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATES HELD BY RURAL PRINCIPALS

Type of Certificate	% Respondents
Full Administrative Certification	89
Provisional/Probationary/ Temporary Certification	4
Other	6

n = 302

Two percent of the respondents indicated that they held bachelor's degrees, 5% held bachelor's degrees plus graduate hours, 75% held master's degrees, 12% held educational specialist degrees, and 7% held doctorate degrees, as shown on Table 16.

Table 16

HIGHEST DEGREES HELD BY RURAL PRINCIPALS

Degree	% Respondents
B.S./B.A.	2
B.S./B.A. plus graduate hours	5
M.Ed./M.S./M.A.	75
Educational Specialist	12
Ph.D./Ed.D.	7

n = 302

In response to the question regarding where they completed their bachelor's degrees, 54% noted that they had received their degrees in the state where they were presently serving as administrators and 46% indicated they had received their degrees in states other than where they were presently serving. (See Table 17.)

Table 17

STATES WHERE RURAL PRINCIPALS EARNED BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Location	% Respondents
In state where presently serving	54
In state other than where presently serving	46

n = 300

As shown on Table 18, 1% of respondents earned their first administrative certification prior to 1960, 16% between 1960 and 1969, 36% between 1970 and 1979, 30% between 1980 and 1985, 16% between 1986 and 1989, and 2% were presently working toward full certification.

Table 18

YEAR WHEN RURAL PRINCIPALS EARNED FIRST ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATES

Year Certification Received	% Respondents
Prior to 1960	1
1960 - 1969	16
1970 - 1979	36
1980 - 1985	30
1986 - 1989	15
Presently working toward full certification	2

n = 290

Table 19 lists the external factors which influenced respondents' decisions to seek administrative certification: 26% were encouraged by district level administrators, 19% were encouraged by principals, 18% were encouraged by family members, 9% were encouraged by fellow teachers, 4% were encouraged by school board members, and 23% were influenced by other external factors.

Table 19

EXTERNAL FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED RURAL PRINCIPALS' DECISIONS TO SEEK ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATION

External Factor	% Respondents
Encouragement from district level administrator	26
Encouragement from principal	19
Encouragement from family member	18
Encouragement from fellow teachers	9
Encouragement from school board member	4
Other	23

n = 267

Table 20 lists intrinsic factors which influenced respondents' decisions to seek administrative certification: 43% desired to influence changes in the school system, 24% desired to increase annual salary, 18% desired greater work variety, 10% desired to improve skills, and approximately 5% were influenced by other intrinsic factors.

Table 20

INTRINSIC FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED RURAL PRINCIPALS' DECISIONS TO SEEK ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATION

Intrinsic Factor	% Respondents
Desire to influence changes in school system	43
Desire to increase annual salary	24
Desire for greater work variety	18
Desire to improve skills	10
Desire for higher social status	<1
Desire for increased interaction with adults	<1
Desire to relocate to another district	<1
Other	4

n = 274

When asked how many years elapsed after receiving administrative certification before appointment as administrators, 68% indicated they had been appointed immediately, 12% after 1 year, 6% after 2 years, 4% after 3 years, 2% after 4 years, and 7% after 5 or more years. Table 21 also presents cumulative percentages.

Table 21

NUMBER OF YEARS WHICH ELAPSED BETWEEN RECEIPT OF ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATION AND APPOINTMENT AS RURAL ADMINISTRATORS

Number of Years	% Respondents	Cumulative %
0 years (immediate appointment)	68	68
1 year	12	80
2 years	6	86
3 years	4	90
4 years	2	92
5 or more years	7	99
No answer	1	100

n = 285

According to Table 22, 20% of the respondents indicated that their university administrative certification training programs were "very helpful" in preparing them for the role of school administrator, 34% said their programs were "helpful," 40% said they were "somewhat helpful," and 6% said they were "not helpful."

Table 22

DEGREE TO WHICH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATION TRAINING PROGRAMS PREPARED RURAL PRINCIPALS FOR ROLE AS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Degree of Helpfulness	% Respondents
Very Helpful	20
Helpful	34
Somewhat Helpful	40
Not Helpful	6

n = 289

Respondents were asked to indicate all university courses and subjects that were most helpful to them in their current assignments. The courses indicated by the greatest number of respondents were school law (67%), supervision (52%), school finance (48%), and instructional leadership (40%).

In response to the question about which areas they would have preferred more instruction, 42% of the respondents listed curriculum design, 32% said instructional leadership, 31% listed computers in education, 31% listed supervision, and 27% listed school finance.

Selection and Employment Practices of Rural School Districts

In response to the question regarding professional goals for the next five years, 47% of the respondents indicated that they plan to continue in their current administrative positions, 18% plan to move to different districts, 15% plan to retire, and 20% have other professional goals, including obtaining district office positions, moving to different states, pursuing other career interests, and returning to classroom teaching. (See Table 23.)

Table 23

RURAL PRINCIPALS' PROFESSIONAL GOALS
FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Goal	% Respondents
Continue in current position	47
Move to different district	18
Retire	15
Obtain position in district office	7
Move to different state	6
Pursue other career interests	3
Return to classroom teaching	<1
Other	4

n = 297

Respondents were asked to indicate how many individuals in their schools held valid administrative certificates and are not currently using them. Table 24 shows that 59% noted that there were no certificate holders in their schools, 21% noted that there was 1 certificate holder, 12% noted that there were 2 certificate holders, 6% noted that there were 3 certificate holders, and less than 2% noted that there were 4 or more certificate holders in their schools.

Table 24

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN RURAL PRINCIPALS' SCHOOLS WITH VALID ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATES BUT NOT CURRENTLY USING THEM

Number of Administrative Certificate Holders	% Respondents
0 (no one holds certification)	59
1	21
2	12
3	6
4 or more	<2

n = 280

Respondents were asked how many of those individuals in their schools who held administrative certificates (but not using them) were actively pursuing positions as school administrators. Table 25 indicates that 43% of the respondents reported that none of the certificate holders were pursuing positions, 46% reported that 1 certificate holder was pursuing a position, 9% reported that 2 certificate holders were pursuing positions, and 2% reported that 3 certificate holders were pursuing positions.

Table 25

NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATE HOLDERS IN RURAL PRINCIPALS' SCHOOLS PURSUING POSITIONS AS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Number of Administrative Certificate Holders Pursuing Administrative Positions	% Respondents
0 (no one pursuing an administrative position)	43
1	46
2	9
3	2

n = 116

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of the individuals in their schools who held valid administrative certificates (but not using them) whom they would hire if administrative openings existed. As shown on Table 26, 38% of the respondents indicated they would hire none of those holding administrative certificates, 50% indicated they would hire 1 of the certificate holders, 11% indicated they would hire 2 of the certificate holders, and 1% indicated they would hire 3 of the certificate holders.

Table 26

NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATE HOLDERS IN RURAL PRINCIPALS' SCHOOLS WHO WOULD BE HIRED AS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Number of Administrative Certificate Holders Who Would Be Hired by Current Principal	% Respondents
0 (no certificate holder would be hired)	38
1	50
2	11
3	1

n = 114

Respondents were asked from where their replacements would be hired if they left their positions. Eight percent of the respondents indicated that their replacements would likely be from their schools, 21% indicated their replacements would be from their school districts, and 71% indicated that their replacements would likely be from outside of their districts. (See Table 27.)

Table 27

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS FROM WHICH RURAL PRINCIPALS' REPLACEMENTS WOULD BE HIRED

Area	% Respondents
From principal's school	8
From principal's district	21
From outside principal's district	71

n = 287

Table 28 indicates the number of persons whom the respondents had encouraged to seek administrative credentials: 75% had encouraged and 25% had not encouraged someone to seek administrative certification.

Table 28

ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN BY RURAL PRINCIPALS
TO OTHERS TO SEEK ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATION

Encouragement	% Respondents
Yes (encouragement given)	75
No (no encouragement given)	25

n = 299

According to Table 29, 24% of respondents indicated that lack of funding was the greatest problem with which they must contend in their schools, 23% indicated that they had too many school responsibilities, 12% indicated that student apathy and discipline was their greatest problem, and 61% indicated other problems, including district office control, teacher apathy and turnover, lack of community support, inadequate curriculum, and school consolidation issues.

Table 29

GREATEST PROBLEMS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Problem	% Respondents
Lack of funds	24
Too many school responsibilities	23
Student apathy, discipline	12
District office control	7
Teacher apathy, turnover	6
Lack of community support	5
Inadequate curriculum	5
School consolidation	3
Other	15

n = 268

Summary, Conclusions, and Questions

The conclusions drawn from this study are presented in three sections corresponding to the data sections presented above. In addition to the conclusions, questions are asked that may be pondered by current principals, aspiring administrators, school boards, and district office administrators in rural school districts as well as university faculty in departments of educational administration.

Characteristics of Rural School Principals

1. The typical rural principal in this study was a married man in his middle 40's who grew up in a rural area. These survey results vary little from national statistics that suggest the average principal is a 47-year-old married man. Over 80% of the principals nationally are men, which coincides with the results of this study: 82% of the principals were men. Questions may be asked as to who is identified and encouraged to seek administrative credentials and who is hired for vacancies in rural principalships. Are women teachers given serious encouragement to aspire to becoming administrators and serious consideration when they apply for positions?

2. Similar to national data, 30% of rural principals in this study were over 50 years of age and, hence, are likely to be considering retirement within 10 years. Only 47% planned to be in their current positions in five years from now. Who will be hired to replace them?

3. The majority of rural principals in the study grew up in small towns or on farms or ranches (62%) and then taught in rural schools before becoming administrators (69%). Even though national studies indicate a glut of administrative certificate holders, will trained administrators with no rural experience consider moving from city to country schools?

4. With 46% of rural principals in this study having been in their current positions for only one to five years and 45% having taught in their present districts before becoming administrators, it appears that many rural principals are being hired from the ranks of those who earned administrative credentials while teaching in their districts. Yet, 59% of current principals reported that no one holds an administrative certificate in their schools, and 71% noted that their replacements would have to come from outside the district. If rural districts often hire local candidates, are the best prospective administrators being encouraged to seek credentials? Should more or fewer rural principals be selected from within the district? What types of training should prospective rural administrators have in order to overcome the hazards of in-breeding since they are likely to be hired back in their own districts?

5. Only 14% of rural principals in this study have been administrators in their present districts for 16 or more years. Considering that 53% indicated that they plan to leave their current positions in the next five years, is the rural principalship seen not as a terminal career point but as a stepping stone to other districts, other positions, other careers? How does rapid turnover in the principalship affect rural schools?

6. Seventy percent of rural principals in this study taught for 7 or more years before becoming administrators, and 43% noted that they became administrators because of their desire to influence change in the school system. With 45% having teaching experience in the districts where they are now administrators, it appears that many wanted to influence their own schools after having much experience there. What if no one with local experience is qualified to become a school administrator? Can a person from outside the district effect change in a rural school? If 71% of current principals say their replacements would have to come from outside of the district, will local school boards search outside of the local district or settle for a less qualified local candidate?

7. In this study, only 60% of the rural principals whose teaching experience was at the elementary level were classroom teachers. The others were physical education teachers, counselors, or special education teachers. Why are so many elementary curriculum specialists in rural schools going into administration? Can they be instructional leaders for classroom teachers?

8. The majority of rural principals in this study with teaching backgrounds in secondary education taught history (20%), science (17%), physical education (13%), or math (12%). Are the majority of rural principals men because administrators come from the ranks of teaching fields that are dominated by men? Or do administrators come from these teaching fields because administrators are expected to be men?

9. Over half (58%) of all rural principals in this study had coaching experience before becoming administrators. This figure is similar to the national statistic of 56% for secondary principals. Is coaching a prerequisite for the rural principalship? Does this expectation preclude the encouragement or selection of women as administrators?

10. The greatest source of supplemental income for rural principals in this study was their spouses' income (53%). Only 13% noted that they derive income from a farm or ranch, but opportunities for outside teaching of extension or university courses were minimal: only 10% earned supplemental income in these ways. In rural areas where job opportunities for spouses may not be plentiful, will potential candidates be less likely to apply for positions?

Certification and Preparation of Rural School Principals

1. The vast majority of rural school principals in this study (89%) hold full administrative certificates as required by their states, and 94% have at least master's degrees. Concern that rural principals may not hold credentials as high as city principals seems unwarranted except in states where the requirements for rural principal certification are lower than for urban principals. Suggestions that building principals earn Ed.D. degrees would negatively impact rural principals, many of whom earned their master's degrees only with great sacrifice. Do states need to raise certification standards for rural principals if those standards are lower than for principals in urban areas? Do lower certification standards attract less qualified candidates? If standards were raised, would rural districts have a more difficult time filling vacancies?

2. Nearly half (46%) of the rural principals in this study earned their bachelor degrees in states other than where they are presently serving. Yet, 62% of them grew up in rural areas. Do university teacher preparation programs train students to teach in specific states or for broader service? Do teacher education programs prepare teachers for rural teaching?

3. Although 46% of rural principals in this study have been in their present positions only one to five years, 83% earned their administrative certification over five years ago. Considering that over 90% became administrators within three years of earning certification, the turnover in the rural principalship is evident. What can rural districts do to attract and keep good administrators? How do principals use rural schools as rungs on their career ladders?

4. Nearly half (49%) of the rural principals in this study were encouraged to seek administrative certification by a principal, a district administrator, or a school board member. In other words, they were encouraged to become qualified for future vacancies. Since 90% were placed in positions within three years of earning certification, encouragement from someone in a position to influence placement was beneficial to the

aspiring principal. Do the men who currently hold the majority of principalships and superintendencies encourage women in the same way that they encourage men to consider becoming future principals?

5. Only 9% of rural principals in this study were encouraged to seek administrative credentials by fellow teachers. Why are teachers not more active in identifying and encouraging teacher leaders to become administrators? Are those who are encouraged by current administrators or who decide for intrinsic reasons to seek administrative positions the persons who will be considered leaders by teachers?

6. The self-selection process of rural principals is evident by the number of respondents in this study who sought administrative certification for intrinsic reasons such as the desire to influence change in school systems (43%), desire to increase salary (24%), desire for greater work variety (18%), and desire to improve skills (10%). Should school boards, current administrators, and teachers be more involved in actively identifying teacher leaders and encouraging them to seek administrative credentials rather than allowing the majority of certificate holders to decide for themselves to seek administrative positions?

7. If an administrative certificate holder has not found a position within four years of earning credentials, he or she is probably not going to find a position. In this study, 68% of rural principals had positions immediatley upon getting certificated; 80% had positions within one year, 86% within two years, 90% within three years, and 92% within four years. Is turnover among rural principalships so great that placement is guaranteed? Or do aspiring rural administrators seek certification only after they have been encouraged to do so and guaranteed a position by the current principal, superintendent, or school board?

8. Just over half (54%) of rural principals thought that their university administrator training programs were helpful or very helpful in preparing them for their positions. As noted by national reports, university preparation programs generally do not prepare students for the realities of the principalship. With 52% of rural principals having been in their current positions for five years or less and 47% having earned their certification since 1980, the claims of universities that massive changes have gone into effect recently may not be well founded. Do university programs prepare administrators for rural schools? Are students assigned to internships in rural settings? Do students study the unique characteristics of the rural principalship or just school administration as practiced in districts adjacent the university? How can universities work more closely with rural districts to prepare rural principals?

Selection and Employment Practices of Rural School Districts

1. Although only 15% of rural principals in this study claimed they will retire in the next five years, only 47% noted that they plan to continue in their current positions. What can rural school district personnel do to recruit principals who will be dedicated to establishing and carrying out long-term goals for their schools? Who will replace nearly half of the rural principals in the next five years?

2. Current principals in this study (71%) reported that their replacements will be hired from outside the principals' districts. Yet, other data indicate that 45% of rural principals had teaching experience in their current districts and 69% at least had teaching experience in rural schools. Will rural districts get involved in hiring administrators away from other rural districts? What can be done to identify and prepare good teachers for future leadership positions? How can rural school districts recruit city-born and -raised administrators?

3. Replacement principals cannot come from rural schools, according to principals in this study. At least 59% reported that there are no administrative certificate holders in their schools who are not currently using their certificates, and 21% indicated that there was only one certificate holder. Of schools with administrative certificate holders, 43% of their principals indicated that no one is pursuing an administrative position (either the administrative certificate holder does not want an administrative job or has given up on getting one). Still more telling is the fact that 38% of rural principals in this study would not hire any of the persons in their schools who hold administrative certificates even if a vacancy occurred, and 50% said they would hire only one of the currently unemployed administrators. In other words, few administrators are in reserve in rural disticts, and even fewer are interested in administrative positions or would be hired even if they were interested. Where is the pool of qualified administrative candidates from which replacement principals will be selected? Who is encouraging persons to become qualified? Who is preparing competent, employable administrators? Who is providing financial support so good teachers can become qualified as administrators?

4. Only 75% of rural principals in this study indicated that they have encouraged anyone to seek administrative certification. Why are not all rural principals actively involved in recruiting good prospective principals? Why is self-selection allowed to determine who are the candidates for vacancies?

5. Rural schools face unique problems. The Gallup Poll recently identified drug use and student discipline as the overwhelming problems facing the nation's schools. Yet nearly half of the rural principals in this study indicated that lack of funds (24%) and too many school responsibilities (23%) were their greatest problems. What are principals, school boards, and university preparation programs doing to educate the public about the differences between rural and urban schools, differences that may attract quality administrators to rural schools? What are they doing to educate legislators and taxpayers to the need for adequate funding to finance rural schools? Why are rural principals not striving to implement creative methods to face the constant shortfalls in the budget and juggle their myriad of responsibilities? What are university preparation programs doing to educate future administrators to handle the problems of rural schools?

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from this study should be of interest to principals, aspiring principals, school boards, and district personnel officers in rural school districts. Current principals may be able to distinguish their role in encouraging bright, enthusiastic, talented teachers to seek the credentials to qualify them for the unique challenges of today's rural principalship. Aspiring principals may be able to discern some of the prerequisite qualifications for attaining an administrative position in a rural school and the advantages of serving in rural schools. School boards and personnel officers may note with some alarm that recruiting qualified candidates for vacant positions may become increasingly difficult when over half of current principals plan to leave within five years and no one is prepared to take their places. University departments that prepare persons for the principalship may be concerned to learn that nearly half of the rural principals reported that their university programs were only somewhat helpful in preparing them for their roles. Because the data for these conclusions came from the principals of rural schools in rural states, not extrapolated from national studies of populous areas primarily concerned with urban problems, perhaps rural educators will be able to use this data to plan for preparing rural educational leaders for the next century.

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